

Four Quarters



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TWO DOLLARS



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Four Quarters

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Indian Summer in the Delaware Valley

TERRY H. SMITH WALLACE

The Indians are gone
and summer.

These many leaves are their spirits.
I bring from the woods
fistfuls supple as skin,
all the blood colors of men.

I show them to Sun, stand
to morning, noon and the setting,
kneel to the cold North and open
my hands.

By the ice moon of January
let snow ghosts dance
and the thin music of cold rage
rise in their limbs.

Old Ties

RICHARD E. McMULLEN

Skinny, no-style neckties --
boxed them up. Labeled
the box, Old Ties. Never
open it again, but
they'd been around my neck
on my chest, so many times.

Bread and Butter Questions

CLAUDE KOCH

MARTY McCANN, THE BISHOP'S MAN. That was the prophetic tag in the seminary. It isn't very charitable of me to say that I never liked him.

I never liked him.

Or to say that he was not very bright in quests of the heart. In charity, he was dense. Ten years and a continent away, and I still resented his Herodian presence.

Lock up the children, Martin's about!

His letter came to me at the North American College, Casa Sancta Maria, Via dell' Umilata 30, Rome, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, and I resented it. Not because he was the Bishop's Secretary and the youngest Monsignor in the diocese, but because he had risked nothing to get where he was and would probably risk nothing the rest of his life.

I buttoned his letter in my cassock and walked off my annoyance in the winter sunset with the vesper bells of Rome sweeping clean the evening air, and with strokes like a tongue in cotton patiently summoning the evening star. By the time I reached the Spanish steps the west was burning, and if I were back in the Sem and innocent again I might say it burned like a Sacred Heart. It certainly burned like the subject of Martin's letter, little Cos Estime of those seminary days, with a fire that made all things new. I wondered if it burned so in the dust of the Via Flaminia. That is where one would have found Cos were he in Rome instead of El Salvador, a child among the obscurities of things that were, and that were imagined. One Epiphany set his steps in the poor streets forever.

Not solemnly, you understand, but abruptly, with the bizarre insistence of a vaudeville routine. Martin, who had charmed his way up the ecclesiastical ladder, could not comprehend this. So he wrote to me. Hadn't I known Cos best? But that was years ago. *Yet he must be investigated. Radicalized, you see . . . And wants to give up his citizenship and be incardinated there. Don't think that there is not sympathy in the Chancery Office . . .*

Ah, Martin, Martin, he might have saved you. He almost saved me, and may yet if I hear again from you.

You never knew him. You were one year out of the Sem and already sharing your cloak with the New Money at Old St. Madeline's on the Main Line when he had his revelation, and it was in no paddy field or coffee plantation, but the rambunctious environs of Widdershins Pike that all of us seminarians avoided like sin. That was where he lost his innocence. (It all sounds like the theatricals he used to star in).

I walked till midnight. The stars went out over Ara Coeli, and it was cold. Martin was judging Cos, but Cos was judging me.

Once Cos said: "Do you think the Twelve took just a sip on that last night? It's a bread and butter question." He was never irreverent, but had he lived in another age he might have been a Fool. No, Martin, you never knew him.

You remember, there were nicknames in the Sem. You were Torquemada, didn't you know? Cos was "Orphan Annie." He had eyes like saucers, like compendious oceans. Looking into them, one could believe in miracle, youth pop-eyed in wonder at the world. You know people like that: they wear all through their lives the badge of childhood; just around the corner, for them, the angel makes his visitation. Sometimes just because of them we say "Lord I believe, help Thou my unbelief." They drag us after them, and once or twice, through their eyes, we are teased by mystery; they invite its presence. That was Cosmo Estime then, a deacon in his third year in theology and out that year for his internship at St. Stanislaus Kostka's. Perhaps the chancery sent him there because his name sounded foreign, I don't know. You see how little faith I have left in the formal procedures. Actually, we saw him only twice that term, once just before his Epiphany sermon, and once just after.

You remember those cherished moments in the Sem when we gathered around the carved oak tables in the refectory of an evening, the dishes cleared away, and some accomplished mimic from the class above to bring back tales of pastors and parish shenanigans, of pomposity and piety, from the Great World that we would soon venture out to save. Otherwise it reached us only through the sirens, the fire and violence transmuted to sound, barely heard through the mulioned windows of the refectory, that fragmented everything, really, light and form, so that we saw nothing whole.

We believed in the quest, our own manifestation to the Gentiles. Legends abounded, and we were eager to perpetuate them. Even the tables on which we leaned were legendary: Doveston, Bird and Hull, Manchester, 1877, shipped from the old world when the first Ordinary had dreams of a second Avignon or Port Royal along the Delaware. But, except for the sirens, the world arrived by messenger, like Cosmo.

Cosmo a guerilla? They would have shot him for mocking them. He was more than a mimic. He was an artist, and he might well have created for us a St. Stanislaus Kostka's that never was. He had his Masters' for which he'd translated and annotated a fourteenth century manuscript of John of Hildersheim, *The Three Kings of Cologne*, but to see him there at the head of the refectory table you'd think he was a visiting high school kid all fired up to a vocation. *Non angli sed angeli* his aunt had said when she gave him the keys to a Volkswagen for his parish work, *non angli sed angeli*. She had attended Miss Shipley's school on Philadelphia's Main Line, and her teeth locked on the Latin.

He came back for the first time that term on the third night after Christmas, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, his face glowing like an old communion plate before Vatican II. We could warm ourselves by little Cos in that echoing barn of a room, floor to ceiling in great walnut panels that were more daunting than the Rector's presence or the gloom of the Perfect of Discipline. He had what we used to call in those days "a devotion" to the Three Kings, and his good news was that he'd been asked to deliver the Epiphany sermon at St. Crispian's, that sedate Anglo-Catholic parish far across town.

Cos in his dog collar (for no one entered the refectory in those days who did not wear the cassock) contained multitudes; and the accents of the fading world of St. Stanislaus Kostka, its pastor, and its housekeeper were a part of our revels that evening. It was good and innocent fun.

Now there is a K-Mart where St. Stanislaus school and convent used to be and, under Canon 1184 ("*Conversio ad usum profanum sordidum*") the church, converted to profane but not sordid uses, serves as a Salvation Army haven for homeless men.

But you must imagine Cos before all of that, there at the head of the table, spinning out of himself a sweet, comic love for his fellow man, and the sense of merry peace it gave us, and quiet, like entering a warm room where the intricate webs hang undisturbed in the sun. A raw season on the outside, but the refectory windows were leaded and translucent, and save for the minatory sirens the rippled glass kept it at a distance.

Martin, Martin, the hand-made glass of the Refectory, how pleasantly it distorted, how comfortingly it excluded! Do you know that Cos once put his fist through it? In sorrow.

Well . . . Cos Estime's pastor at St. Stanislaus Kostka's was a wraith of a man ("You had to look twice," Cos said; "he was too short to be a pole."), but given to moments of unexpected firmness when his Sign of the Cross developed into a featherweight's uppercut. One of his Deacon's innocent pleasures was to bewilder the old man with his alligator turtle neck, or his guitar, or his soft leather shoes, all those

perks of Vatican II.

"Led me see yur fud, now," Fr. Tumaz would say, or "Wad beast is dad?" Or so Cosmo heard him, with an innocent ear more tuned to vaudeville than to accents. Tumaz had been a superb Latinist, but the New Church had left him with little to do with that tongue. And his English had suffered a sea change, to our delight and the delight of little Cos. Enough said. A Polish dialect needs a Masters' hand. I'll save it for the punch line.

They liked each other, the Pastor and the Deacon, and Cosmo preened himself mildly with the conviction that he alone brought the Great World beyond the walls to the vast, windy rectory; for, more and more, the old priest confined himself to wandering the four cavernous floors and the draped and tenebrous rooms under whose Edwardian swags and moldings five assistants had once bustled.

What was Fr. Tumaz tracking down? Cos didn't know. Sometimes his footfall, jarring a loose board over the back parlor, distorted the picture on the housekeeper's T.V. and swung the *podlaznik* that hung point down from her ceiling, and swayed the chandelier-like *pajaki* whose ingenious designs of paper and straw draped by the large Christmas evergreen. Cosmo sampled the apples and nuts and *swaity* with delight, and practiced getting his tongue around the old peasant terms.

"I'm doing to Polish what he does to English," he'd say. All his life Tumaz had served in an ethnic parish: sermons in Polish, and , after Vatican II, the Mass in the Old Tongue. All over now; the financial city had moved in like Herod against the children and left little room for poor parishoners. Cosmo told it tenderly, so that one could believe in the Children of God.

Like a dutiful son, the Deacon, who had no father of his own, strove each Sunday to be back at St. Stanislaus rectory by six-o-five, because, just as the great Angelus bell ceased to shake the empty church, the Pastor would be bent over his supper plate, his hand, so large for such a gnomish body, within inches of the dinner bell. And in the kitchen the mad housekeeper would strain to descend upon them with unpronounceable Eastern European dishes. Yet it was a nice accommodation: Cosmo Estime's Sunday afternoons were free, and he had discovered Ecumensim. So just about the time Fr. Tumaz' hand reached the bell, he'd be inside the scored oak doors of the Rectory after a defensive drive along Widdershins Pike from St. Crispian's evensong far across town. How hazardous this was on a nose-bitten, frosty St. John's Eve within the octave of Christmas, he'd try to tell the Pastor.

"But you got home," and Tumaz blew on the seat before he sat in order not to crush a soul that might be lodging there. "Good, now we eat." He hardly sounded like that, of course; and there was always a

pause while Cos transliterated. Then: "You have no idea, Father. That street is a Comanche Trail. People signal left and turn right; they pop up from nowhere and you can't see them. It's an allegory of the world, perversity run wild."

"Then stay home. One place's good's another. It's St. Vitus dance."

"No, no, Father. You should get out and get around. Come to St. Crispian's some day. Believe me, they use more incense than the Vatican. They'll be led by the nose into the Church." Cosmo enjoyed his own humor perhaps more than anyone else. "It's time for a change; change is in the air." He had some news to break slowly: "Why not invite the Canon over some Sunday? I tell you, change is in the air."

"Hah. Like when the Quakers got the ACLU after us for bingo in the firehouse." Fr. Tumaz settled behind his cigar and blew smoke out of his ears. "Some 'Friends.' That's ecumenism."

Cosmo took the plunge: "They've asked me to give the Epiphany sermon at Evensong."

The featherweight came through: "Yes? You got permission?" Fr. Tumaz was sometimes obsidian; perhaps it was the eyes.

"Of course, Father, it all depends on you, but I didn't think you'd mind."

"Why not?" The old priest went back into his shell. "Nothing to do here." Then the housekeeper came in, and during the protracted exchange in Polish the Deacon dreamed of a triumph on Epiphany at Crispian's. It was that anomalous conjunction of Vatican II and Anglican tradition that charmed him — an apostle to the Gentiles, indeed.

"You heard it?" Father Tumaz's question was ambiguous. "Another rumor. They're building a K-Mart." So had the Gentiles eaten away at the old man's parish. "Pretty soon, all *kaput*."

"Cheer up, Father," Cosmo said; "look at London, the parishoners move out, but then the Church serves the businessmen. You catch them on the fly." Cosmo had never been closer to London than Hackensack, but he had his ear to the ground at Crispian's. "Not to worry."

"They closed St. John Kanty's." Fr. Tumaz shrunk still further behind his plate and raised smoke against all optimism. "It's getting cold here."

And late that night the Deacon could hear the Pastor's unsteady footsteps, poking by tactile memory into the dark and vacant upstairs rooms, and the tumult of ancient plumbing. As Cosmo told it, his face, as fresh and open as a spring meadow awaiting the plow, would cloud over. "There's a fatalism, a peasant patience about him that breaks my heart sometimes. I'm not used to the sorrows of old men."

But we moved away from that thought quickly enough; it was

hardly meet for the festive season, and uncharacteristic of Cosmo. He was on firmer ground with the housekeeper.

The housekeeper was surely mad, or possessed. It pleased Cos to be undecided. She appeared and disappeared, Cos said, and her actual location in the great house was frequently a matter of doubt. Sometimes she sulked with a cantankerous calico cat before the television; sometimes she harranged Cos in phrases vaguely translatable from the Women's Liberation Movement. Her progresses through the bleak corridors were tempestuous; she seemed a distracted angel, a fury, to whom deacons were, indeed, a lower order. She might have unsheathed a Sword of Fire before the gates of innocence. Cos anticipated her intermittent appearances with a fascinated unease — it was so comforting when she left. She essayed just enough English to fix her in the Deacon's mind as an unreconstructed alien. Her name was Hilda Wardzinski.

"Hay, Misder," she'd say, "yur spoiled. You doan ead yur pud-din," or "Misder, you ged home fur subber or you doan ead." She was a shepherd of repasts. Seldom did her conversation not revert to this. She cajoled and threatened by beet and bean, so that when she appeared at his parlor door on the Eve of St. Stephen, Cosmo's immediate thought took him back to his orphaned but affectionate rearing by the maiden aunt, and youthful questions concerning uneaten spinach and greens. And yet, to be chided and reproofed, and wanted and cared for again . . . ! But Hilda Wardzinski's commitment was to Fr. Tumaz alone.

But there she was, at his door, and perhaps it was the matter of the Epiphany sermon on which he labored that led him to perceive her biblically, her hair raised as though moved by a current of fire, and the mop in her hands like St. Michael's sword at rest.

"He's donstairs," she said. "He painds sacred hards on wadges."

Cos sorted that, digested it, and came up with a reasonable response: "Yes?"

"He wands to taug."

"He wants to sell me a watch?"

"He wands to sell you a car."

"It's a mistake. Tell him to go away."

"Misder," her mop divided the threshold, "He painds . . ."

"I know. Sacred hearts on watches. I still don't need a car, Mrs. Wardzinski."

Sometimes, on the facades of Gothic cathedrals, such admantine intensity was captured in the sculptured pose of sibyl or prophet: "You bedder listen. You be sorry . . ."

Cosmo Esteime closed the door politely. Mrs Wardzinski and her mop receded like all our yesterdays beyond the door.

The house creaked like a ship. Cosmo thought of partings and journeys. He heard the ancient oil furnace go on, and there was the clap of expanding tin in the air vent. He felt deliciously alone.

So detached from the blundering world, in such a mood, one could contemplate the Magi: how elegant and fastidious Kings of the East journeyed in separate and jeweled silence to an Herodian land, swayed to sleep on the camels' backs that rose and fell like the pulsing of Time itself. Until they met, those strangers, at a place where three roads joined, and their alien languages were reconciled as a single prophetic tongue of leaping flame. *That* struck just the right note. There was a tap on his door.

"Please, Mrs. Wardinski," he said. But the corridor was dark, save for a pale night light hanging like a scarcely materialized emanation outside the Pastor's room down the hall. Cosmo was not tall, but he saw with ease above the silhouette on his threshold. Perhaps his eyes were strained from bending too assiduously over the Eastern globe. The Pastor was a peel of shadow or of dark glass.

"Let me in."

"Of course, Father." Cosmo hurried a rocking chair over by the hot air vent. "It's late for you."

"It's *Święte Wieczory*, it's the Holy Evenings." Fr. Tumaz blew on his chair. "God Himself walks the earth." The Pastor's legs did not reach the floor. "A Guest in the house is God in the house. She is upset. You should go down."

And Cosmo, the mimic, would shrink behind the table in the refectory as he told of Mrs. Wardzinski's distress, until we could believe that it was Fr. Tumaz explaining it all: how one waited for the guests on the Holy Evenings; how scarce they were in these latter days; how in the Old Country it might be God Himself (and Cosmo's mimicry would strike the incredulous note) painting Sacred Hearts on watches or selling used cars. The laughter was joyous, and not mocking.

"I'll apologize, Father. I did not know the custom. Anyhow, I've got a car. Why should he call on me?"

"Zoltan Sleveck. Every year he comes on the Holy Evenings," the Pastor arced his large hand back and forth: "Business and pleasure. I don't drive; you drive." He bent forward to get a start, and rocked like a child, gaining momentum. His gaze withdrew under clumps of his white eyebrows, like stones under snow, and he seemed to be traveling. Cosmo waited patiently. Finally: "At home, on Christmas Eve, the animals talk in human voices; only the innocent hear them." Then: "Bells ring under water, and the springs turn to wine and honey." He rocked forward until his feet touched the floor; "It's too late now."

Cosmo caught the priest's arm as he lurched forward: "Father, can I get you some tea? Let me get you something."

"It's too late."

Later, as Cosmo put a period to his sermon, the snow wind against the shutters almost rose above those hesitant steps that rattled the loose joists overhead. He heard the Pastor fretting with the weary grandfather's clock in his room: the chimes ran together, and then all the hours struck at once.

AH, MARTY, MARTY . . . I hear the bells, the minatory bells of Rome. It's three a.m., and they summon to an accounting. You shall have it, because in judging Cos you pass judgment upon me. *Cos' Casual Comedy* shall we call it? It's like a fiction I have lived, and I no longer am sure what, in its essentials, belongs to Cos' imagination and what to my own, and what has no part in the imagination but poses the "bred and budder quesdions" that old Fr. Tumaz debated through the grim white-sheeted Edwardian rooms of St. Stanislaus Kostka's.

Epiphany came and went, and it wasn't that long ago, was it, Marty? But a choiring time, when more than the Magi seemed to wear their plates of gold. Cos came back to the seminary on February 2, Candlemas Day. He was too late for supper, but the refectory was warm from the recent meal. "Our Lady of the Candles," he said. He sat without taking off his coat. "That's what *they* call it. There were five old women in the procession today. No one else. A candle went out."

We tried to comfort him: "You must be cold. Have some coffee."

"No." Though he mimicked no one, he seemed physically diminished behind the table. He did not look at us with the untranslatable eye of Fr. Tumaz or the exaltation of his possessed housekeeper; he fixed upon the distorting panes of refectory glass as though there were some answer there. Then: "What do you think they really did with . . ." He dipped his head toward us with the expression of a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar: ". . . with the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh?" Was he acting again? "And the cold . . . God, how cold it must have been . . ."

Perhaps he was leading, straight-faced, into a joke. "Come on, Cos, what's new? What are you up to? Tell us about the sermon." We could wait for the punch-line. "Tell us about Epiphany."

His hair had always been his one vanity. It framed his face like a medieval courtier's. "An angel," his aunt had said when he preached his first sermon, "an angel by Carlo Crivelli." *Non angli sed angeli*. And often, in his laundry, she packed an angel cake, sly wit of a doting aunt, and absolutely against The Rule.

"It's ten-thirty," his barber had said. Was it later than he thought on that Epiphany? "No, that's the charge."

It wasn't a bit like the movies. The man made absolutely no con-

cession to the Cloth, and Cos was in his dog collar. *Nova Cuts* the sign read, banging after him in the intermittent sleet and the morning wind.

The Pastor's voice had scarcely risen above the knockings in the radiators under the painted glass of St. Stanislaus' lancet windows that morning, and the public address system had long ago failed. After Mass, the score of old parishoners left the church a shell and appeared at the rectory door, bearing gifts. Fr. Tumaz introduced them, one by one: "They come like the Kings," he said. "Pretty soon, where do they go? It's a bread and butter question." Cos sat still, then lapsed into the old man's dialect: "Id's a bred and budder quesdion." Perhaps it was true. "We were in the seminary together," the Pastor said of the Cardinal, "but it's getting late." To the Pastor, Cos said, the closing of St. Stanislaus would be like interdicting the stable at Bethlehem; perhaps it was easier for the Cardinal — his ethnic roots lay under carefully cultivated urban sod.

Such melancholy reflections accompanied the Deacon as he set out for St. Crispian's. The morning had broken from night like a husk, the core of night was still there, and heavy clouds scraped shag across the bulk of St. Stanislaus' tower. Behind the wrought iron gates of the parish churchyard one forlorn railroad tree had pushed up through the brick, and snow unseasonably logged with water was a sulky residue by the first pastor's cenotaph. What would they do with those old bones when the Cardinal finally put his foot down? Perhaps it was the threat of winter lightning, the sullenly charged air, but Cos felt at a loss, as, when a child, the bleachers filled on Fathers' Day at Prep, and there was no one to applaud his play. He teetered at the church steps, uncertain of past or future, and hugged his sermon to him like a security blanket. A police car rocked by, its siren pulsing, the rotating web of flashing light a firey wheel that Ezekiel might have seen. It was too dismal a day for visions. A tall man in a dark overcoat, swinging an umbrella like a scythe, caught his arm as he passed. The St. Crispian sermon slipped to the ground, fluttering in front of the stranger, who stepped upon it.

"Sorry, Father, but I couldn't tell whether you were coming or going." The envelope was wet, a fine start for the day. Cos was bewildered enough to say: "But I'm not a priest."

The air brakes of a trolley clattering past the rectory burned darkly. It should have been a clear day, with sounds far away, and a fresh snow making all things new — it should have been a day for children, he thought. But the fumes of traffic lay close to the ground, and he backed his Volkswagen from the rectory driveway into resentful horns. How could one evoke those gaudy and alien kings on such a day?

He pulled up to a drug store for a box of cigars, Italian stogies banded in gold, the Pastor's last comfort. "Gift wrap, please," he said.

The clerk deducted ten percent: "Have a good day, Father." Epiphany brightened, and momentarily the January wind rinsed the air of middle earth. He drove toward Widdershins Pike. Over the ragged city skyline, huge shapes emerged in the Eastern sky. Were the Magi preceded by sirens? The winter lightning arrayed and disarrayed great dark cloud heads in tiaras of gold. Plated armor rose and fell, and caravans moved, ominous and stately, across the element. His Epiphany sermon unfolded there above the traffic, like a toy panorama of his childhood. "The Unexpected Majesty," the title came to him like a revelation. A camel's hump filled the horizon; and as he watched it whisk away he turned into Widdershins Pike, where the festive season had long since lost its energy. No Christmas wrappings blew along the gutters there in the diminished light. No streamers hung from pole to pole or draped boarded and ravaged facades that had no place in his vision. He looked up from jaywalking pedestrians, but the vision was gone. The car lurched.

It was a flat, no doubt of it. Talk about coming down to earth, Cos said. He limped to the curb and stepped out into a scattering of broken glass. He sighed, gathered his sermon and shook out the dampness, packed the cigars under his arm, locked the car, turned down his scarf ostentatiously so that his dog collar showed, and set out in a mode of transportation as unfamiliar to him as to the Magi. It was characteristic of Widdershins Pike that gas stations had gone the way of drug stores. He would have to abandon the caravan. He walked.

Drab black figures shuffled past, Arab shapes of Galilean Jews cluttering the shabby ways along which his Magi searched? Something to remember if lesser lines were blotted. Yet he was not prepared for -- a mullah's lament from a tower? *Drop kick me, Jesus, through the goal posts of life . . .* He was certain he had heard it, unlikely as that seemed. Such charismatic chants were not to be anticipated on Widdershins Pike; he'd gathered that from simply driving through. It blared from a storefront, and he was shoved toward it, caught between a supermarket cart ridden by a disreputable black child and propelled by a black girl in her teens, and a hunched black man carrying a two-by-four that whacked the Deacon between his shoulder blades. He recoiled. He might have been a king of Tarshish, lost on Broadway, there was such a contrived, theatrical quality to the moment.

The Holy Rock Evangelical Apostolic Church — behind the panel of the storefront and framed by plastic representations of stained glass, the Gothic lettering identified the source of bedlam. A black man of uncommon tallness, propped in the doorway, balanced to one ear the radio from which issued the theological directive. Long of face and long of hand, he exposed a range of teeth as white as his ecclesiastical collar. His hair hung in disconcerting dreadlocks.

"Come in, Man," he said; "come in, Reverend. It's de house of de Lord."

As he told it, Cos' dialect faltered. He seemed to relive the emergency, with which he was totally unprepared to cope. "What . . . ?" he said; "what . . . ?" And so it came to pass that, like the guest without the wedding garment and summoned precipitously from the byways, he was ushered firmly through the open door.

"We brothers, Man," the large man adroitly unshouldered the radio and thrust a card into his hand. Fingers reached around the lintel and the radio vanished. There was that inescapable pressure on his arm, and a voice in his ear: "Ah kin tell yo' a man of vision . . ." Then he was propelled into a room against a blast of sound that reduced Jesus and the goal posts of life to a whisper.

"Come on, Cos," I remember saying; "it *was* Epiphany, the time of the unexpected? That's a Twelfth Night tradition . . ." But he kept his solemn face, and we awaited the droll moment so cleverly withheld.

"That's me," *The Reverend Antipater Slim* the card read, *Rector and Proprietor - The Holy Rock Evangelical Apostolic Church*. And Cos pulled the card from his overcoat pocket and laid it on the table. "Who yo', Brother?"

Cosmo was crushed. He mumbled "St. Stanislaus," swallowed, and looked wildly about. "We *co*-religionists," the Rev. Slim said, "*co*-religionists."

In the cave of fantasy behind the storefront he grew aware of incongruous things. There was an altar, surely, but was that a television set perched upon it? And was that *The Secret Storm* competing with radical lyrical blasts from The Second Coming, who spoke from a stereo on the epistle side? Crowding the television was a tabernacle, and atop the tabernacle a monstrance.

"Beautiful, Man," the Reverend Antipater Slim swept a hand in appreciation; "dem Brothers of St. Bardolph sold out their *re*-dundant chapel: *re*-dundant, they said, *re*-dundant." He squeezed Cos' arm: "We got a lot in common, Brother."

Strobe lights complicated the television screen and whirled volleys of shooting stars on stereo and monstrance. Cos was aware of snufflings nearby, and his own urgent need to decamp.

"Join in a prayer to de Lord, Man," the Reverend Slim was actually pressing him to his knees, "a prayer to de Lord." Cos was still a man of many voices, and we smiled at his doleful tone. "A-men . . . A-men . . .," and sleepy confirmation arose unenthusiastically from the dark under the strobe lights. Time passed as in an enchanter's cave.

It would not be injudicious to say that Cos Esteime left that place in a state of shock. Sounds unnatural to the human ear followed him up Widdershins Pike: "y'all come back, hear!" Antipater Slim waved

from the doorway the hand not engaged with the retrieved radio.

Cos was sufficiently modern to know that miracles are ceased, and wonders officially the property of Disneyland. Yet there was still room for nightmare. His eyes were wide to the wonders of the imagination, but not to the improbabilities of fact. Was this a joke he was springing on us?

The sidewalk seemed a freeway for children riding pilfered supermarket carts as wagons, and he barely escaped the press before a state liquor store that could have been composed of hands reaching for the Pastor's gift cigars. It was altogether a missionary experience and quite beyond the call of duty. Meanwhile, through a vision and a dream, dark figures flitted, balancing huge radios. They were real indeed, for though the noise level did not change, the endlessly repeated refrains occasionally did. He arrived, exhausted, before a drugstore and blessed the window, festive with deodorants, depilatories, and toothpaste, that told him he had safely managed Widdershins Pike. He bought himself a bottle of aspirin.

AT ST. CRISPIAN'S, the Deacon's hosts remarked to each other upon his bemused air, and attributed it to piety. Candlelight wavered across polychrome statues and gothic bosses, the atmosphere of a proper English village church. He mounted the pulpit in a state of ecclesiastical abstraction, still carrying his peace offering to Fr. Tumaz, and his sermon. To his ecumenical congregation, the gift-wrapped box was appropriate and symbolic — they needed no explanation. Cos became aware of it himself with some confusion. He extracted his sermon from its envelope and spread it on the lectern. In a silence that left him curiously deprived, he turned to his text.

"Ah, yes . . .," he began, with the air of one who has entered a scene *in media res*, "the manifestation to the Gentiles . . . One can see them, these comfortable men, having arrived in state, after the star, in their garments of green and gold, startled to find themselves . . . to find themselves . . .," his voice faltered, the ink had run, the high style was leveled, and one word was as illegible as another. yet he could not stop; he carried on, extemporaneously, from some unsuspected spring, with the surprise of one who has stumbled on the denouement of a detective story: "What had they to do, these comfortable, men, with peasants, with the lowest rung of the social ladder? How unearthly the choiring must have seemed! Sounds hardly fit for the ear of man, engendering dreams and nightmares for years to come!"

He lingered over that, as though listening for an echo of what he had said, as though for confirmation that he had said it. A sigh escaped the congregation: *Non angli sed angeli!* "Why," he said, still in that attitude of listening, "why should this epiphany, this revelation, this grotesque majesty be shown to such unlikely persons, the comfortable,

the kings of the earth? Oh, the things that can happen. . . That can *still* happen," he said. "You have no idea." And in a gesture of wonder, or despair, he spread his arms, scattering his useless homily like chaff. Exhaled breaths fluttered from rapt dowagers in the choir. *Quelle geste!* "The *things* I could tell you . . . that go on in the world . . ." It was not what he said, but the transfigured voice, as though he spoke with tongues. "There are revelations every day . . . *re-dundant* revelations," and he waved Fr. Tumaz' cigars. In the shocked silence that followed, he realized that he had simply been scared out of his wits and slow in recovering. But to the congregation of St. Crispian's, this wild-eyed visitation on one sedate evensong hinted at levels of meaning. Whatever he subsequently said Cos Esteime could not recover; but sidesmen and churchwardens quite agreed that Epiphany had never, at St. Crispian's, been more thrillingly shadowed forth.

Afterwards, in the parsonage, Cos gulped down a sherry.

"Do you mean," Canon Anstruther said, "That you're parked down *there*?" His wife proffered the decanter.

Six sherrys later, Cos was feeling himself again, he could not resist: "It's Epiphany. It's Twelfth Night. Everything at sixes and sevens. Lord of Misrule. Festivity. . . . High jinks . . ." Cos could do the six sherry voice well.

"Well, I'm delighted that you can take it so lightly," Canon Anstruther tendered another sherry: "Can you change that tire?"

"Just get me there." The sherry was as good as adrenalin. "Greater miracles have happened." Through the gothic windows of the parsonage the afternoon was flushed and enriched. It had actually been a triumph.

"I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU," the Canon said, "this neighborhood is not my cup of tea."

"Let me out here. It's just around the block. I'll walk."

"If you say so. I'm glad to help, but I don't even like to turn into Widdershins, I never feel that the drivers have licenses." The Canon laid a restraining hand on Cos' knee: "Here. Your box. It was all quite effective. You have a future as a preacher."

When Cos turned the chill corner he saw the odd cant to his Volkswagen down the Pike. He attributed it to a flat tire and sherry. But a figure whose dreadlocks hung like a threat rose from beside the car and rolled a wheel up and into The Holy Rock Evangelical Apostolic Church. "What!" Cos cried. "What!" and tumbled over yet another child and another supermarket cart.

It was a fact. There was his viper-green Bug, three-wheeled and with the front axle up on wooden blocks, while around it rocked and crashed and throbbed alien sounds, piped through the open door of

Reverend Slim's establishment.

"I roared," Cos said; "it was the sherry." One would have given much to hear Cos roar. Bewilderment and outrage warred within his breast, and he was through the door of The Holy Rock Evangelical Apostolic Church and tripping over a recumbent figure before he came to his senses.

"Reverend." A hand lifted him bodily, and a voice close to his ear overcame The Grateful Dead. "Ah knew yo'd come back to de Lord's House. We do thank yo' fo' you contribution."

"What...! What...?" Cos blinked at the strobe lights, and there was a heavy odor of something not sherry.

"Doan worry, Man," the Reverend Slim said, "give us yo' key. I goin' put yo' *ex-trey* wheel on right this minute."

"My extra...? My what...?"

"Who needs a *ex-trey*. The good Lord gives *ex-treys* fo' dese folks." The large hand turned purple and rose and green and gold as it waved across recumbent figures on the floor and huddled shapes in chairs against the wall, who in their turn underwent vivid transformation. "Dey in fo' de night. Fo' de night," he repeated, an octave higher.

Again, Cos Esteime felt himself propelled and overcome, bewildered as St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Antipater led him stumbling over grunting, multicolored forms and across in front of the altar to the protests of alcoholic voices. "This my *sacristy*," the Reverend Slim spoke proudly; he opened the door and Cos' wheel rolled out. He flipped a switch. Bereft of speech, Cos looked upon the spoils of the Church: supermarket carts, automobile tires and wheels, strings of outdoor Christmas lights, three municipal flares and assorted garden furniture, two park benches, and a dog house. "*Ex-treys*," the Reverend Slim said; "we gets *ex-treys* for de po' folk out dere. Des money in *ex-treys*." He pointed to a wood stove in the corner on which a great laundry pot steamed: "Soup. Y'all hungry?"

"Hungry...?"

"Fantastic. Give me yo' key. I put on de *ex-trey* wheel. Yo' have soup." He released Cos' arm: "Close de doah. Jes relax."

Cos gathered his shattered resources while the Reverend picked his way back over recumbent figures. He closed the door; but still, through it, breathed and huffed inarticulate mutterings as of a multitude of beasts.

There are moments that press upon us a reconsideration of things as they are. Cos implied that this was one of them. "I tested the soup," he said. "I didn't know what else to do. Then I counted the strings of lights. Slim must have dismantled the decorations of a city block. That would have been difficult to do, a triumph of a kind, also." Cos finally shed his coat; his suit was rumpled as though he had been sleeping in it. "It was a point of view that had never occurred to me,

with calculation, that is." There was silence in the refectory as he fixed his eyes on each of us in turn. "Then I began to think of the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh, where had it come from, where did it end up . . . ?" He was engaged with such unsettling thoughts, seated on a park bench and sipping soup, when the Reverend Antipater Slim returned.

"Done, Brother," Slim spoke at the top of his lungs from the doorway. "Better 'n new. Y'all been charitable, too!" He thoughtfully removed Cos's wheel from his path as he guided him from the room.

Cos was well away from the curb before he realized that the Reverend Slim was waving with the Pastor's cigars: "Y'all come back, hear!"

COS PULLED UP at the rectory in another snow flurry.

"Huh," Mrs. Wardzinski stepped aside from the door unwillingly, "you not late for a change."

"Where's the Pastor?"

"Don't bother him. He's setting the clock. It don't work."

Supper corresponded with the Angelus. Some things, at least, were predictable.

"You don't eat?" Fr. Tumaz said. "Big party over there?"

"No," Cos said. He played with his spoon. "I . . . well, I had something on the way home."

Silence. Then:

"Father, what do you think happened to the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh?"

"What a question!"

Mrs. Wardzinski held Cos's empty plate dangerously over his head. "Not good enough?" She left the room, breathing Polish.

"Fader . . .," Cos caught himself, "Father, I'm serious."

Tumaz' eyes could be like gunstones: "Are you having a crisis of faith?"

"Why do you say that?" But before Tumaz could reply, Mrs. Wardzinski put her head through the drapes.

"He's there. He wants St. Stanislaus." She pointed maliciously to Cos. "That's you, he says."

"Wait . . ., please," Cos said to Fr. Tumaz.

The Rev. Antipater Slim relaxed on a chair by the door. "A fine establishment," he said. "All *right!*"

Cos had not a mean bone in his body, but he could not resist: "Where's your radio?"

The Reverend held out the gift box of cigars:

"Not *ex-treys*. Yo' got a fine place here, Brother," he said.

"Yes," Cos said. "It's not mine. I work here. Thank you. Goodbye."

"Right, Brother. But yo' come see me. We gonna build."

Cos asked even as he came back through the drapes: "Why did you say that?" As he told his story then, we knew he had left us. He was back at St. Stanislaus Kostka's. I think he is still at St. Stanislaus Kostka's, no matter where *you* place him, Marty.

"Id's a bred and budder quesdion." I remember his mimicry, but there were tears, not humor, in it. "Dey cause trouble. Stig to mystery, id's safer." The old priest's eyes softened: "Wad you god dere?"

Cos came over beside him, Tumaz was such a little man, and his physical reach was short: "Id's for you, Fader," he said.

Tumaz held his hand over the cigars: "You gud. Doan worry about gold, abod Myrrh. Abod where id goes." He teetered to his feet. "Come wid me, son. Help me stard de clog again."

He took Cos by the arm, and they went upstairs. All that night Cos lay awake, listening to the hours they had set right between them, and thinking about the imminence of certain questions in Bethlehem, and at St. Stanislaus Kostka's.

We sat quietly, not knowing quite what to say, not sure that a point had been made. Cos pushed himself to his feet: "He believes in the Kings," he said. "He believes in the Spirits that sit on the chairs on the Holy Evenings. What protection are they for him now?"

He settled his coat around his shoulders like a cloak, as though he were cold, and walked to the window. I felt for him, Master of Arts, Comedian, Translator of John of Hildersheim. Mimic Extraordinary, young Deacon. He was tapping at a loose pane in the leaded glass when I put my arm about his shoulders.

"Come on, Cos. It's only a legend. You know that. Where would we be without legends?"

"Where am I now?" he said. "Where am I now that I know the question?" He looked at me with those orphaned eyes of his, and smiled his half-moon, clown's smile. "Fr. Tumaz has no *ex-treys* in all this great Church. I think I must go out and get a park bench or two, or a dog house; I think I am too proud to unstring the municipal ornaments."

"Look here, Cos," Perhaps I was too attentive to my own gestures, but I did not see the blow; and when I looked up Cos was sucking on his knuckles, and the wail of a siren seemed appropriate to the broken pane.

"It's what they don't tell us that matters," he said. "That's what I'll do, when I know enough. I'll preach a sermon on the Wise Men and the *Ex-treys* . . ." He poked at a sliver of glass: "How will I explain this?"

I don't know how he did, but I think you have the explanation, Martin. I wonder, will you someday be investigating me? Only faith prevents one's asking the bred and budder quesdions, Martin, but I think that only the questions prove the faith.

Sunday Morning Triumphant

STEVEN ALLABACK

EARLY ON A CLEAR, breezy, beautiful Sunday morning a small crowd gathered near a banner stretched between two light standards in the parking lot at the marina. The banner read: THE WINNING WOMAN – 10K ROAD RACE – FINISH. Fifty yards away, but only a few feet from where the runners passed, three men sat in aluminum lawn chairs in the bed of a pickup truck. The men had fishing tackle with them and were drinking beer, laughing, calling out at the women as they finished the race: “All ri-ght, momma.” “Whatcha running from, baby?” “Shake it, lady, shake it.”

“Jesus,” said Serge. “I can’t believe those guys.”

“Can’t you?” replied Dorothy. “I can. I see them all the time.” Dorothy was his former wife.

He looked at her.

“I don’t mean those exact men,” she said.

“They’re a disgrace to the sex,” he said. But he was aware also of the sparkling beauty of the place, the early morning sun shimmering on the water behind the pickup truck, the warm wind, the salt smell of the sea. He wondered why the men were there, whether they had just returned from an all night fishing trip or were waiting to embark on one. It might be fun, he thought, to go fishing on the open ocean.

“Boys will be boys,” she said.

But they were not boys. They were men in their thirties, wearing darkly stained jeans and dirty cowboy hats, and they seemed to be looking for trouble.

“Someone ought to say something,” said Serge.

“No one here feels threatened.”

“Unless it’s me?”

“I don’t mean that at all.”

He believed her. He was just jumpy. If trouble arose, these strong and healthy people all around him could handle it easily enough. It was their problem anyway, not his, but so far they seemed unruffled by the shouting men in the pickup and continued to applaud politely as each finisher passed beneath the banner.

“Those potbellied slobs couldn’t run like that if they tried.”

Dorothy laughed and tapped him on his own soft stomach.

“They’d die after about ten yards,” he went on.

"They would probably do better than you think, Serge."

He wanted to deny that too, but she knew more about running than he did. The breeze gusted up in their faces and again his attention was deflected: everything seemed so fresh and clean this morning. It had rained briefly the night before.

"Here she comes," said Dorothy, pointing. "I knew she'd do well."

Their daughter, Sondra, was running easily and very fast. "My God," said Serge. "She looks great."

Of course," said Dorothy, standing on her tiptoes looking over the people in front of her.

"Well, I do have an idea, you know, of how hard she works."

But he certainly hadn't expected her to do this well: she would finish in the top twenty. A half-mile or so farther back, he saw the other two hundred runners, a stream of brightly clad figures on the concrete bikeway next to the beach. His own daughter had broken away from the pack and was up there with the best of them. He could feel his heart beating.

"Come on," said Dorothy, pulling him by the wrist. She led him out of the crowd and up the race course to the point where the concrete bikepath met the asphalt parking lot. "Let's go, Sondra, let's go," chanted Dorothy, clapping her hands. "Go, go, go."

She danced around and yelled so much that even the men in the pickup stopped their chatter to stare at her. But Sondra responded—she smiled, she raised her hand, she ran even faster, obviously pleased to see her parents cheering her on. Serge also yelled: "Come on, Sondra." His voice sounded hoarse and foreign. He tried again. "Come on, Sondra."

"Hiya, Dad," she said as she passed by.

"Come on, Sondra, come on."

Now the crowd saw her and began cheering and clapping. "Look at that little girl run!" he heard someone say. He stopped yelling and merely clapped. He didn't want anyone thinking he was forcing this wraith of a girl to perform for his benefit. He was not a frustrated athlete. He was no athlete at all.

One of the men in the pickup jumped down and lurched into the path of the runners. He held a can of beer, and as Sondra passed by he offered it to her. "Here you go, Sweetheart," he said, thrusting it near her face. She brushed it aside with a quick upward motion of her forearm, and it dropped foaming to the ground. The man began to curse. "Hey, you little bitch," he shouted. "You better run, you little bitch!" His friends were laughing. When Sondra crossed the finish line, she looked alarmed rather than triumphant, but as soon as Dorothy and others rushed to congratulate her, she began to smile again.

Serge stood where he was. The man picked up his beer can and waited for the next runner, a woman in her late twenties who looked as strong and happy as Sondra had. Serge yelled at the man: "Out of the way, you clown, you stupid idiot!" He yelled so sharply and with such authority that the man scurried for the pickup, where his friends leaned down and hoisted him aboard. Then they all turned and looked menacingly at Serge. "Asshole," said one. Serge pretended to ignore them and keep his attention on the runners, who now were passing by every few seconds. He clapped for each of them and found himself calling out, "Nice going" and "Good run." He was waiting for the shock to hit him. He wondered why he wasn't afraid. He should have been. Ordinarily he would have been.

Suddenly he was enveloped by a great amplified blast of noise, a steady pounding of rock music playing so loudly it could be heard, he imagined, for miles. The men had placed stereo speakers on the cab and on the hood of the pickup. The music seemed to lower itself like a heavy fog and hover between Serge and the soft, shining Sunday morning. He hated that sound. He looked toward the finish line and wondered why someone didn't tell the men to turn it off, but the crowd was busy congratulating the finishers and urging on the stragglers, doing what it was supposed to do.

He saw Sondra striding out of the crowd with her mother, waving at him enthusiastically and smiling, taking a skip step or two as she walked toward him. Now that she had stopped running she looked much smaller and more frail, and yet the muscles working in her thighs reminded him again of how hard she must work, how disciplined she must be. He had known this before, but not as he knew it now, all at once, with frightening clarity.

"Congratulate your daughter," said Dorothy.

He did, over and over again. "Sensational, you were sensational, Sondra. Sensational."

"Thanks, Dad." Her cheeks had whitened and sweat rolled down her face, but she was very happy. "Walk it off with me, will you? Come on."

Serge looked over her head for Dorothy's permission. Not that he needed it, but in a way he did. He didn't exactly know the procedure. How much did all this mean to Dorothy? At this triumphant moment wouldn't she want to be seen with Sondra? Wouldn't he be regarded by them both as an undeserving interloper?

"Go ahead," said Dorothy. "She's your daughter too."

"I know that," said Serge. "I just thought you might want to come along."

Dorothy shook her head kindly. She had this experience all the time, she seemed to be telling him, and she could certainly allow him a few minutes alone with his daughter.

"Come on, Dad," said Sondra. "I need to walk."

"Stretch a little too," said Dorothy. "Don't forget last time."

"Yes, Mother Dear," said Sondra. "Come on, Dad."

A tall, suntanned man appeared beside Dorothy. "Pretty good run, Sondra," he said.

"Pretty good? It was great," said Serge. "She's only thirteen."

"Really?" said the tall man. "I would have thought her a college coed, she's so pretty and smart looking." He winked at Sondra and gave Serge a friendly smile while he held out his hand. "I'm Brent."

"Excuse me?" Serge cocked his head to one side. "That damned music, I can't hear." The tall man's eyes seemed as clear and placid as an alpine pond.

"*Brent.*" he laughed. "It is pretty loud, isn't it?"

How you doing," said Serge, but Sondra tugged him away in the middle of their handshake.

"Let's go," said Sondra. "I want to see the rest of the finishers."

Who's that guy?"

"That's only Brent. He's a friend of Mom's."

"I see. I suppose he runs too."

"He's a real runner."

"As opposed to a false one?"

"No, I mean he's good."

"I see."

SERGE GATHERED HIMSELF as they walked past the pickup truck, but the men had lost interest in the runners and were facing the marina, their heads bobbing in time to the music. They were talking loudly, gesturing with their beer cans, having a hell of a time, protected by the pulsating sound.

"Icky men," said Sondra. "Let's get away from them."

"That guy didn't hurt you, did he?"

"He scared me."

"If he so much as touched you."

Sondra looked at him and laughed. "My hero," she said. She reached around his waist, pulled him stumbling toward her, and kissed him on the shoulder.

"You're the hero today. That was great, Sondra, just great."

"It was okay, Dad, but not great."

Not great? Sure it was. How many other thirteen-year-old girls can do that? You finished tenth out of two hundred and fifty."

"I finished nineteenth, Dad."

"That's still great."

"And I was only second in my age group."

"Second?"

"Linda Cheyney beat me by a full minute. She always does." Son-

dra pointed back toward the finish line. "See that girl in the yellow shorts? That's her. She's *really* good."

"She doesn't look thirteen to me," said Serge. "She looks about eighteen."

"She's twelve."

"That girl's twelve?"

"She's got boobs. That's why she looks so old."

That was true. He hadn't realized Sondra noticed such things. How odd that she would acutally come out and say it. "Well," he said, "at least you did your best. That's what counts."

Sondra laughed again.

"Didn't you do your best?"

"Yes, Dad, I did. Don't worry so much about it. Everything's cool."

They walked along the concrete bikeway, the beach to their right, the asphalt parking lot behind them. The breeze hit him again, and he glanced out at the breakwater protecting the marina. He should spend more time outdoors, he thought, more time exploring and studying things carefully. He saw how the spray jutted upward on the ocean side of the breakwater and he noticed the forest of black pilings beneath the pier off to the south. That his daughter was beside him made everything even better.

Whenever a runner approached, she would clap and yell encouragement, and he decided to join in too. Earlier he had heard others saying to runners, "You're looking good," and so he settled on that: "Looking good, looking good," he said to each passing woman. But those this far back in the pack were exhausted, pouring sweat, panting, many of them in agony, some barely able to take another step. Several frowned at him when he said "Looking good, looking good," and one even replied "Feeling bad, feeling bad." But Sondra seemed to know exactly the right words: "Gut it out," she'd say, or "Only a hundred yards," or "One step at a time."

"Let's head back, Dad," said Sondra. "I need some water."

"Boy I'm proud of you."

"Girl, you mean," she said, kissing him again on the shoulder.

"Young woman I guess is what I really mean."

As they reached the conjunction of the bikeway and the asphalt parking lot, one of the men in the pickup spotted them. Serge noticed him speaking to the others. "Yep, Sondra," said Serge. "You did it. When's the next race?"

"In two weeks," said Sondra. "Dad, those men are staring at us."

"What men?"

"In the truck. I'm scared."

"Don't be silly. They won't do anything."

As they passed the men, Serge gazed coolly in their direction and nodded as if they were old friends. "Yeah, that's that guy," he heard one of them say. "The asshole." Sondra and Serge walked on, Sondra comically humming a shaky tune as if she were in a haunted house movie, Serge debating whether to turn around and challenge the men—or at least look fiercely at them. Halfway between the pickup and the crowd at the finish line—blocked from his sight by an empty yellow school bus—Serge heard something bouncing along the pavement behind him. He wheeled around in time to see a crushed beer can come to a stop a yard or two from Sondra's feet.

"If she don't want my beer, she can have my can," whooped one of the men. "Yeah, yeah, *yeah*," said another.

Serge picked up the crushed beer can and ran toward the pickup.

"Dad!" screamed Sondra. "You dope. Come back here."

He was surprised at his own calm, at how clearly he could focus on the cowboy-hatted men before him, at the lucky accuracy of his throw: the beer can caught the wind and veered directly into the chest of the same man who had assaulted Sondra earlier. The others in the truck seemed surprised too, and that angered Serge even more: they looked at him as though he were a curiosity, smiling dismissively from the corners of their mouths at the furious charge of this unmuscular, pale, outraged citizen. One of the men picked up the crushed beer can and tossed it at Serge's feet. "Try it again, buddy-boy." But his voice cracked when he spoke, and the others said nothing, though their music blared on.

Serge stood there, breathing heavily. "You guys are making yourselves obnoxious. Don't you know that? Don't you know people are laughing at you?" He made a motion with his arm to include the marina, the runners, their friends, the entire area. And that was all he could say or do. He was out of words, aware of where he stood and how he appeared. He glanced over his shoulder: Sondra, Dorothy, others, all were hastening toward him, their faces pinched with concern.

"It's a free country, pal."

"Yeah. We got just as much right as those runners. They're obnoxious to *us*."

"Listen," said Serge, "You don't go around throwing beer cans at people and especially you don't interfere with, practically knock over, the runners." What was wrong with him? He had come to the race today absolutely determined to remain poised and observant, to support his daughter as best he could, not to yield to some wayward tide of self-pity or confusion or anger. "You guys could learn something from these women. You ought to pay attention." The men sat lazily in the lawn chairs.

"You gotta be kidding, Mister."

"Hey, why don't you bug off?"

"Yeah. Go jog with those sweaty stick-ladies."

Serge moved to the front of the truck, picked up the stereo speaker sitting on the hood and raised it above his head—"Hey, whatta ya doing?"—and then noticed that the cord could be pulled out without damaging anything. He pulled it out. The music shifted violently to his left, no longer as loud, no longer the pulsating heartbeat of some strange threatening beast. But then one of the men rose quickly, and Serge saw him rummage around in the truck, reach down, and with a passionate "Here" threw a handful of something his way. Anchovies, salted and oily. One or two clung for a moment to his shirt. The man reached into the bucket for another handful, but one of his companions stopped him. "That's enough, Carl." Serge agreed: it was enough. He wanted out. He wanted to run away.

SONDR, DOROTHY, AND THE TALL RUNNER with the clear eyes were next to him now, and the commotion had brought others their way too. A lady with a visor took him by the arm and pulled him aside. "OFFICIAL - Ruth Pierce" said her name tag. "What are you doing, for God's sake?" she asked him, a mocking smile on her face. She too was lean and wiry, gleaming with good health, apparently a veteran runner, perhaps forty or forty-five.

"Just trying to help," said Serge.

"To *help*?"

"These guys were interfering." He shrugged his shoulders. "I was trying to help."

"Help whom?" She kept pulling him away, her fingers biting into his arm, pulling him as if he were a child.

"Don't pretend you didn't see them. You heard the music. You can still hear it. What's wrong with you people anyway?"

He jerked his arm away from her and looked back at the pickup truck. A small group, including his daughter and his former wife, were talking with the men. The tall runner - Brent, Serge remembered - was grinning along with the men, nodding in a friendly fashion, making peace. He saw Sondra watching Brent. Then she turned to look at him, at Serge, and he made an A-O.K. sign. She waved.

"Music is nothing to get uptight about," said Ruth Pierce.

"They're drunk too. Grabbing at the runners."

"Oh my Lord," she said, dropping her hands helplessly, shaking her head.

Dorothy and Sondra joined them. Sondra made a funny face at him by sticking out her tongue and crossing her eyes. He knew he should kiss her goodbye and leave.

"Did they throw those fish at you, Serge?" asked Dorothy, laughing.

"It's a joke?"

She reached out to touch him and said reassuringly, "No, no, I'm sorry. I just couldn't resist."

"Well, I'm sorry if I've spoiled things," he said.

"Men have to play their macho games, I suppose," said Ruth.

"Now Ruth," said Dorothy, "I'm sure Serge was only trying to help."

Did that mean she understood? Or was she telling him she knew full well the vulgarities he was capable of, the black, unproductive wrath he seemed to have been storing up for years?

"You know this man?" asked Ruth Pierce.

"He's Sondra's father."

"Well, I still have to say" — she paused and seemed to soften her expression, and adjust her tone — "I still have to say that you've only stooped to their level."

"No," said Serge. He felt himself catch fire again. "I most certainly did not stoop to their level. Not at all. I'm not at all like them, darn it." He wanted to explain that he had never before done anything like this.

"You are a little, Serge," nodded Dorothy.

"I am?"

"All men are like that," said Ruth. She clicked her tongue in disgust and trotted away.

"I just got angry at those guys. I'm still angry."

"I don't blame you either," said Dorothy.

"I thought you did."

"I mean I can understand why *you* got angry." They were walking back toward the finish line. Dorothy kept seeing people she knew and saying a word or two to them—"Great day, isn't it?" "Nice run, Letty," "Hello there, Jan, how are you?"—and it annoyed Serge to see that her charitably remaining at his side cost her something.

"But, why aren't you angry, Dorothy? That's what I don't understand. I don't see why people let them get away with it."

"Serge, I'm not angry because it's not worth getting angry over."

"But it is!" He had to check himself. "Really, it is." But it wasn't all anger, either. He also wanted to tell her how good he felt.

"Live and let live, Serge. People have their different lifestyles."

What a word. Don't use that word. I thought you didn't use words like that."

"No orders, Serge."

"Sorry."

"The word is here to stay, Serge. Face it." She jiggled his forearm as if to awaken him, but she did it affectionately. "So are people like those men, Serge. They're here to stay."

"You mean we have to get used to living in fear of creeps like those? Come on now, Dorothy."

"Not to fear, Serge. Live and let live," she said gently. "It's a very important idea. It's something I've learned."

"I haven't learned it."

"But I have, Serge."

Sondra and Brent jogged up beside them. "Hey, you two," said Brent, "your superwoman daughter still has some juice left. Amazing." His face was cordial, his eyes as generous and forgiving as a clergyman's. He was older than Serge, but he looked younger.

"Did you settle it?" asked Dorothy, indicating the pickup truck, speaking as if there was no question that Brent would settle it. Maybe, Serge thought, he's a policeman. But he's too skinny for that.

"Sure," said Brent. "No problem."

"He talked to them about fishing," said Sondra. "And other things."

"Why them cowboys," drawled Brent, "was only a-blowing off steam."

"Not true," said Serge. "They were trying to hurt people."

Brent looked at him, so Serge went on: "I don't think guys like that should be let off so easily."

"They aren't bad men, Serge," said Brent. "Just confused by the pretty ladies and a little drunk. We've all been there before, I suspect."

"They were more than confused, I'd say."

"Live and let live is my motto," said Brent.

"Dad," said Sondra. "Are you going to stay around for the awards? I'll get a prize for coming in second in my age group."

"Isn't she a winner?" said Brent proudly. "It's such a pleasure to know a celebrity." He bowed grandly to Sondra and pointed to the awards table, where Ruth Pierce was calling for everyone to quiet down and listen. "Let's go garner the treasure." As Brent and Dorothy started off, Sondra lingered for a moment.

"I've got to be going, Sondra," said Serge. "I've got an appointment, darn it. But at least I saw your victory."

"Not a victory, Dad."

"Well, whatever. It was great to see."

"Hey, Dad, it was great when you went after those nerds in the truck." Sondra danced from one foot to the other and twisted her hands nervously as she spoke. "I was really scared. I thought they'd beat you up or something. You really told them off, didn't you?"

Serge laughed. "I guess I did. I can hardly remember what I said."

"Brent just tried to make them laugh."

"Well, maybe that's the best way." All the anger had ebbed away now and so had most of the exhilaration, but he did not feel empty.

"Nope. I liked what you did better. Make'em sweat a little." She hugged him again.

"Thanks, Sondra."

He watched as she ran to catch up to Brent and Dorothy. They made room for her between them, and both put an arm around her, but he didn't mind that at all.

Fascia

NATON LESLIE

He develops habits to call
attention to himself:
sits on a stool,
spreads his legs and pours
beer into a glass by his crotch.

A song by Andy Williams
The Academy Award Winning
Call Me Irresponsible
and other hit songs from the movies.
It's R5, he plays it twice.

He tries to make his hands big
on the glass like they're not made
to hold delicate things.
He drinks with his bicep,
the glass like five pounds.

Now a tattoo sneaks past
his sleeve, the scales
of justice, the number 13½:
One judge, twelve jurors
and half a chance.
Says he bought it in the army.

The skin cannot stretch
on these hands, nothing
to tie together
the inked arms and the reach
for all things close.

Contributors

A member of the English Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, STEVEN ALLABACK makes a second appearance with us (see 1974's "The Plasterers"); he has also published stories in *Kansas Quarterly*, *Epoch*, *North American Review*, *Texas Quarterly*, and other journals. He is the author of a number of scholarly articles and of *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* (Warner Books, 1979). CLAUDE KOCH has not only been producing some of his best fiction in recent years, but he has also started on a new literary career—as a playwright. His play *Mother* (an adaptation of his short story which originally appeared in *The Antioch Review* and was republished here in the CK issue) will have its premiere at Hillsdale College in Michigan in February. It's his second work in the genre to be produced. NATON LESLIE is a Ph.D. candidate in Creative Writing at Ohio University, where he also teaches. A high school teacher in Ann Arbor, Michigan, RICHARD E. McMULLEN has published over 200 poems in the last 35 years. His latest collection is *Trying To Get Out* (Crowfoot, 1981). TERRY H. SMITH WALLACE is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Harrisburg Community College and co-founder of the Susquehanna Poetry Consortium. His work has been published widely.

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